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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a professional development effort designed to revitalize, remotivate and reactivate an experienced staff of teachers. This program creates an organizational culture in which each individual is perceived as a learner and a leader. The program is designed to meet the needs of the teaching staff at any place in their career cycle and aims to establish an organizational culture which promotes lifelong learning. The aim of the program is to give teachers a chance to hone their intellectual skills and translate what they learn about learning and teaching to the classroom setting. To this end, each school in the district has a reading and research room set aside for the use of the teachers. Time is made available for the teachers to use the room during their work day. The room is outfitted with professional journals, books, tapes, and electronic media. Teachers are encouraged to do field-based research during their work day. Teachers are also encouraged to engage in individual professional development activities, to attend conferences, and to observe other classrooms. (JD)

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BEYOND CRUISE CONTROL: THE PROMISE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A paper presented at the annual convention of the National Council for the States on In-Service Education, San Antonio, Texas, November 17-21, 1989

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INTRODUCTION

If necessity is the mother of invention, our schools should be hotbeds of innovation, right? Wrong. Take a walk through many public school buildings, look and listen to what is going on there. Two words will describe it, tired blood.

Teachers and administrators are tired of being blamed for all that is wrong with society. They are emotionally and physically drained. It is demoralizing for them to hear that their efforts are too little, too late, too ineffectual. Most of all, they are tired of someone else--government or big business--telling them how to fix things.

Educators didn't always have these attitudes. Earlier in their career they were more optimistic about what they were doing. Of course, they were younger and more enthusiastic about everything then.

Statistics tell us that as a group teachers are about 50 years old. They have been teaching for almost 20 years and most have been in one school for at least 15 of those years.

Think about that for a minute. That means our staffs are older as a group than most Americans (average age is about 40). Unlike many Americans, particularly those in the business sector, our teachers have had relatively stable careers. I say relatively because these people are the survivors of the great RIF (reduction-in-force) Wars.

When school districts were frantically searching for people to fill newly built classrooms, many of these same teachers

answered the call to public service. They were ready for the challenge.

As student enrollments plummeted during the seventies and early eighties, these same teachers were vulnerable to cutbacks and layoffs. It is not unusual to find teachers who have received such layoff notices. Talk with them, however, and they are not sure whether they were the lucky ones!

Just about the time that many of these survivors were feeling some job security--the first of the national reports was published. Once again, teachers experienced uncertainty about their future in public education. Like everyone else, teachers learned that we were awash in a "rising tide of mediocrity."

For many, the response to such unabashed criticism was to emotionally disengage from the foray. They closed their classroom or office doors and tried to carry on as usual. the loneliness and isolation of teaching as a career contributed to their disengagement (see Levine, 1989).

I think this disengagement is graphically portrayed by something I saw in the mid-1970's when I was on an evaluation team of a high school in a major American city. Among other things, this high school was in the middle of a court-ordered school desegregation project. As you might imagine, there was a great deal of turmoil about this decision, and yet teachers were expected to carry on as usual and to "tough it out."

On the second day of our visiting team's stay, a student riot broke out. Hoards of students began to move through the

corridors and out of the school building. I happened to be in the cafeteria when all of the action started. I was talking to several teachers who were on their break. Within moments the place was in tremendous upheaval. Chairs started flying through the air, tables were knocked over, and students were running in all different directions. It seemed to last for hours although it only lasted for moments. During this entire time not one of the veteran staff stopped their conversation or responded in any way to all of the hubbub around them. Instead, they carried on as usual and they "toughed it out." Many of our teachers have reached this same point in their careers now.

The effects of daily stressors in the lives of our teachers have been underestimated. As institutions, schools are not generally focused, flexible, or user friendly (see Kanter). To cope, many teachers rationalize their feelings of isolation by giving us a good effort but not a great one. In the finest schools many of the students and staff are clearly on cruise control.

The focus of this paper is to talk about how we move our staff beyond this frame of mind. It is about how we revitalize, remotivate, and reactivate the experienced staff in our schools.

Our discussion will take us in many different directions but my basic premise is that a Professional Development program helps create an organizational culture where everyone can be perceived as a learner and a leader.

We are at a critical point in public education where educational leaders must create policies, practices, and programs that aim for continuous educational improvement. In many cases we must do this with limited resources. But we have one resource that has been unappreciated and undervalued. In all of our schools we have a wealth of Human Capital. We must learn how to put our Human Capital to work in more effective ways.

RIPPLES NOT WAVES

The most recent educational reform efforts are occurring in stages. We hear about "waves" of educational reform. To be honest, however, our efforts are more akin to ripples than to waves.

During the first ripple of our efforts, we concentrated on adding things to the school program--more time to the classroom, to the school day, or the school year. The battle cry was "back to basics."

But playing "catch up or keep up" was not enough. We realized that we had to focus on changing teachers as well as programs. In our second ripple of reform, we began to hear a new phrase, "teacher empowerment."

Ask ten people what teacher empowerment means and you're likely to get ten different answers. But there seems to be a general understanding that teachers should be involved in important school-based decisions and that the focus of our reform efforts should be school-based. The literature suggests this

seems to improve the staff's willingness to go the extra mile for some kind of change you want to bring about. Ironically, on the surface empowerment seems like a good idea but there continues to be resistance to this notion among a lot of rank and file teachers.

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Legitimate educational change must be more than smoke and mirrors. It must be based on a sound theoretical foundation. When introducing an educational change, our task is to create a school culture that encourages innovation and risk. We must celebrate failure as well as success. We must create a school culture that champions individuality but still expects individuals to focus on a common vision and direction for the institution/district.

So any kind of change effort must consider changing both the institution and the individuals within that institution. In third-wave reform efforts we must anticipate significant institutional innovations in school governance, policies, and practices. These changes would complement other major changes in our expectations for individuals who work in those schools. A well-conceived Professional Development program makes change acceptable. It begins to nurture the Human Capital in our schools. The potential payoff in terms of the return on our investment is enormous.

FROM INTUITION TO INTENTIONALITY

In planning Professional Development programs we must consider the career cycles of our staff. Our planning must intentionally meet the needs and interests of teachers who are at various phases of their career cycle. No one magic formula exists.

The goals of all our efforts should be:

(1) to give our teachers a chance to hone their intellectual and instructional skills

(2) to be able to translate what they learn about learning and teaching to the classroom setting

(3) to help teachers to articulate their craft to others.

Implicit in these goals for professional development is that students' learning will improve. Our planning should be anchored in the research and not based on someone's intuition (Let's try this!). Third wave educational reform moves teaching and learning away from intuition and toward intentional outcomes. We must help our teachers shift their focus toward a group practice of education.

TOWARD GROUP PRACTICE

Empowering teachers to plan a Professional Development program helps to break down the isolation of the classroom that has been so characteristic of their careers. It gives teachers the chance to communicate and collaborate with people. It moves teachers from the idea that they have been in private practice to

the notion that as a professional they are in the group practice of education.

Except for the most recalcitrant teacher, just the chance to have a say in their own professional development acts as a powerful incentive to do something different (see Joyce and Showers). As Mitchell and Peters pointed out, in motivating teachers to participate and to perform, we tell them to try harder, to do more, to do better, and to get results. But wishing doesn't make it so. Teachers must be willing to risk failure in order to attain success in their careers.

CARROTS NOT STICKS

The research on motivation indicates that extrinsic forms of motivation have very limited value. Intrinsic motivators are more likely to result in major shifts in attitude, behaviors, or values (see Herzberg).

Teachers report that they do not get enough recognition for what they do. They feel taken for granted. There is not a lot of chance for growth in their career and after a few years their job is not very enriching. Teaching is fairly predictable and that predictability leads some teachers to coast along. Is it any wonder that they shift to cruise control?

We must recognize our teacher's contributions. This will help our staff to feel more motivated to participate in our initiatives, we must recognize their contributions. We need carrots like recognition, legitimate responsibilities, and collaborative opportunities to challenge our teachers.

THE EAST LYME EXPERIENCE

Our community has a reputation for educational excellence that is by all appearances well-deserved. The community has always been supportive of education. There is an intense interest in our schools by most of the community. This interest goes above and beyond the parents of students who are actually enrolled in our schools. With all of this concern and support there is a general perception that we are on cruise control.

As administrators we wanted to rekindle the enthusiasm for teaching among our staff. We sought to initiate change through challenge. To do this we looked toward professional development.

OVERT AND SYMBOLIC ACTIONS

On the obvious side, two teachers chair our district-wide professional development team. Both teachers work closely with the assistant superintendent who helps to develop their confidence, knowledge and leadership skills. No administrator serves in a leadership capacity.

This district-wide planning team spent more than two years to develop a model that is building-based. They created the structure, norms, and the operational practices for this model. They wrote a mission statement for our district. They became colleagues who are confident about their role and responsibilities. They are wonderful peer models for the rest of the staff.

Our team controls the district budget for professional development. This budget reflects actual needs and is not an

imposed budget. On a more symbolic level, administrators were expected to go through their building teams to request approval for their own professional development needs. This sent a very powerful message to our staff--no one person has veto power over what happened at a building level.

BUILDING INITIATIVES

Each school based their professional development program on the district model. In my school some rather interesting things came out of the building-based professional development plans. We have an R and R room for our teachers--not Rest and Relaxation, but Reading and Research, room. That room, adjacent to the media center, contains a full professional library, a computer that has the entire district's curricula on it (a teacher can access this to find out whose teaching what, when and how). There is also a Macintosh computer that is available for teachers to use for their own word processing or desktop publishing needs. Finally, we have a terminal that leads directly to the data-base retrieval system that is accessible for all of our staff. This keeps them current on the literature in their field.

We also made a conscious decision to make time available for our teachers so that they could use the Reading and Research room during their work day. Some of our professional development funds are used to hire substitutes who relieve teachers of non-instructional duties like study hall or hall patrol. Teachers need only to sign up for this time and one of the substitutes

relieves them to go into the R and R room and use it as they wish.

With a minimal investment we have outfitted the room. Professional journals, books, tapes, and electronic media are all available. We want them doing field-based research and we give the opportunities during the context of their work day.

OTHER CAREER INCENTIVES

It has been our experience that teachers have increasingly become interested in using this room to read in their field using that time to keep abreast of what's going on and to begin to reflect on what they are doing. These professional development activities go beyond the scope of the formalized professional development program.

There are also budget line items that allow teachers to engage in their own professional development activities that meet their own interests and needs by simply getting approval from the building-based team for those activities. We want teachers to attend conferences. We want them to be able to observe other schools or other teachers. We want to acknowledge the need for them to communicate and collaborate with peers by subsiding that activity.

Finally, in our district we provide five days of professional development activities. All of those activities, are planned, by teachers for teachers and administrators. These district activities are implemented by teachers for teachers and

administrators, and district-wide evaluation team will begin to assess those formalized professional development programs.

As part of our career incentive program teachers will be able further to apply for mini grants to financially support field research. They may choose from twenty-five other programs to support their needs.

SUMMARY

Recently, we have had obvious signs of a slumbering giant coming fully awake. We've seen teachers who are gaining new interest and enthusiasm for what is going on in their classroom and among their colleagues. They seem more willing to take risks, are more innovative, make more demands to be supported in these new endeavors. We are at a point now where teachers are beginning to feel in control of their professional development for themselves and for the district.

Our program of is designed to meet the needs of our teaching staff at any place in their career cycle. It aims to establish an organizational culture which celebrates lifelong learning. Equally important our teachers have legitimate leadership opportunities which utilizes their experience and expertise. Our teachers are alive, again, with promise. As we move toward the 21st century, we have consciously sought to "commit people to action, convert followers to leaders, and leaders to change agents" (Bennis, 1985). Our investment in human capital has paid many dividends and the profits continue to pour in.

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